



Preventing Dehydration

What is dehydration?

Dehydration is a lack of fluid in the body. Fluid fills almost every space in our bodies and even helps form the structure of some larger molecules like protein. Dehydration can be dangerous and sometimes even fatal.

- Water is the primary fluid in the body and serves a key role in the digestion, absorption, and transport of nutrients in food.
- Water aids in the removal of toxins and waste products from our bodies.
- Water helps the proper regulation of body temperature and joint lubrication.
- The human body cannot store fluid, so it must be replaced every day.

When fluid intake is adequate, the body has the right amount of fluid and electrolytes for proper functioning.

Is dehydration more common in older adults?

Yes, older adults are more vulnerable to dehydration. Reduced muscle mass, decreased sensitivity to thirst and less efficient kidney function all can contribute to dehydration. Studies show that one in three older adults may not get enough fluid. Declines in physical condition and mental sharpness can also contribute to dehydration.

What other things affect hydration status?

Dehydration can result because of weather or health status. For example, in a hot environment we perspire more, resulting in greater fluid loss. Dry winter air can increase fluid loss. Running a fever increases fluid needs. Medications, especially diuretics and laxatives also can increase fluid loss.

What are the signs and symptoms of dehydration?

Dehydration is identified many different ways. The first warning sign of dehydration is thirst. Other symptoms include:

Headache	Increased heart rate	Constipation
Fatigue	Low blood pressure	Sunken eyeballs
Dark urine	Decreased urination	Decreased functional ability
Weight loss	Dry mouth, tongue, and eyes	Decreased skin turgor

In some cases, problems such as weakness, trembling, lethargy, or confusion can result from dehydration.

How much fluid does a person need every day?

Fluid needs are based on a person's body size, the weather, activity, and medical history. The old recommendation of eight 8-ounce (oz.) glasses of water per day is a good place to start in figuring out how much water you need. Evaluating the color of your urine while eating a balanced diet and drinking eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid in a day can help indicate if you need daily fluid. A registered dietitian can help you figure out how much fluid is needed. Milk, juice, coffee, tea, and

water all count as sources of fluids. Discuss the amount of fluids that you drink with your doctor or healthcare professional. Some conditions call for a person to limit or restrict fluids.

Are there fluids in foods?

Yes. Individuals who eat a balanced diet can get the equivalent of two to three 8-oz glasses of water from the fluids found in the foods they eat. Many fruits and vegetables have high water content, as do soups, gelatin, and pudding. Dry foods, such as snack foods, cookies, and cheeses, have low water content. If a person is not eating, or is not eating well, additional fluids may be needed to make up for the fluids missed by not eating well.



Tips to stay hydrated

- Drink water and other beverages on a schedule to help reach goal.
- Set a daily fluid goal. Individual needs vary but a minimum of six to eight 8-oz glasses can be a starting point. Include soup and other high fluid content foods in your diet regularly.
- Eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Limit fruit juice.
- Drink a glass of water or other beverage with meals, snacks, and medications.
- Keep a glass of water nearby and take frequent sips.
- Drink warm beverages in the winter and cool beverages in the summer.
- Add flavor to water with lemon, cucumber slices, or mint leaves.
- Select beverages that are low in calories to prevent weight gain.
- Remind elderly friends and loved ones to drink, offer the glass rather than just asking.
- Be alert for signs and symptoms of dehydration.
- Limit, or avoid, alcohol which is a diuretic (increases urine output).
- Look at your urine, if it is dark (like apple juice) then drink more liquids. Pale yellow urine indicates good hydration status.

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